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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of two studies that investigated the effectiveness of the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative (SS/HSI), a federal grant program designed to promote healthy childhood development and prevent violence and substance abuse. The first study, titled "Results of a Longitudinal Study of Disciplinary Referrals in an Urban School District," evaluated the success of programs funded by the grant in Pinellas County (Florida) schools. It investigated referral patterns over a 3-year period from 1998-2000. While results show that violence does occur in these schools, the frequency of violence appears to be much lower than perceived by the general population. Of the 109,628 students enrolled during the 1999-2000 school year, 42,615 students had at least one disciplinary referral with at total of 180,912 referrals reported in the district. A small percentage of these referrals were either violent or policy type referrals. The majority of referrals (80 percent) were in the classroom behavior and campus/school rules categories. The number of referrals did not change over the 3-year period; however, fighting did decrease. In the second study titled "A Factor Analysis of Perceptions of Violence in Pinellas County Schools," 101 school counselors were surveyed on school safety and familiarity with SS/HSI program strategies. The majority of counselors (60%) perceived their school to be safe. Teasing and bullying were their major concerns. (CR)

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Symposium:

The Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative: The Evaluation Context in District Wide Initiatives

Co-Chairs
Oliver T. Massey
Kathleen Armstrong

Discussant
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Introduction to the Symposium

The Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative is a joint effort among the Departments of Juvenile Justice, Education and Health and Human Services. Over 70 grants between 1 and 3 million dollars have been awarded to address the needs of children in our nation's schools. The grants were designed to promote healthy childhood development and prevent violence and substance abuse. The initiative includes a mandate for the evaluation of grant activities, program efforts and student outcomes. This symposium concentrates on evaluation methodologies and the results of process and contextual analyses of funded sites. The two papers provided here include the results of a district wide study identifying staff perceptions of risks and violence in schools, and a longitudinal analysis of disciplinary referrals for students in a variety of grant funded programs. These presentations provide two methodologies for learning about the context of safety in the schools.

The survey of school counselors is a straight forward attempt to understand the kinds of problems confronting staff in schools. The results serve as a reminder that the extraordinary violence reflected in school shootings, while highly visible, may be a less significant threat on a daily basis to students than more mundane acts of intimidation, teasing and bullying. We hope that the domains identified in this study will serve to classify and explain the experience of violence for our nation's school children.

The second study is a preliminary analysis of disciplinary data maintained by the school district. This data set is important both because it serves to illustrate the kinds of behavioral problems confronting schools, and because it is a foundation indicator of the health of the school. For a school intervention to claim to be successful, the program's impact must be reflected in the accounts of the day-to-day experiences of teachers.

Results of a Longitudinal Study of Disciplinary Referrals in an Urban School District

Michael Boroughs, Oliver T. Massey & Kathleen Armstrong

Introduction

In recent years, violence in the nation's schools has become a central concern to society. Media reports imply that this is a growing problem that must be addressed. One strategy to combat youth violence in the schools is intervention via programs to curb violence, reduce substance use and increase the perception of safety in the nation's schools.

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative (SS/HSI) is a U.S. government funded grant supported by three departments of the government. The Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services and Education have collaborated in awarding grant monies to local school districts in an effort to fund programs in cooperation with community partners and law enforcement agencies with the hope of improving school safety and making students healthier.

Pinellas County, Florida has approximately one million residents and a large urban school district with approximately 111,000 students. Pinellas is one of four districts in the state of Florida to be awarded a grant by the SS/HSI. Part of the Initiative includes a percentage of the funding to include an evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation is to measure and report the success or shortcomings of

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the programs funded by the grant. Our role as evaluators is to collaborate with the district and community agencies that provide services in an effort to collect data using multiple methodologies to report an accurate reflection of the grant funded programs.

One source of data includes a referral database provided by the district that is currently available for the three years prior to the grant. These data tell us many things about student behaviors during a given school semester. This referral database will be maintained throughout the three years of the grant. In this database, referrals are grouped into 36 categories. These categories range from minor infractions such as "tardiness" to serious or violent acts such as "battery on a student." Each occurrence of these behaviors is collected and organized by individual student's referrals, albeit most are included in the less severe categories.

This presentation reported on the analysis of referral patterns over a three-year period in the Pinellas County schools from 1998-2000. While the results show that violence does occur in these schools, the frequency of violence appears to be much lower than perceived by the general population. The benefactors of this information include parents, especially those with kids in the schools; the district, particularly administration and professionals who are given an accurate report of what indeed takes place; and communities, since everyone lives in some proximity to a school. In addition to helping to place media reports into context, this information also helps researchers and evaluators gain an understanding of the problems involved, and offers professional techniques to combat them.

Method

Participants

This study was a secondary data analysis. Of the 109,628 students enrolled in the district during the 1999-2000 school year, 42,615 students had at least one referral with a total of 180,912 referrals reported in the district. The discrepancy between the number of students referred and the number of total referrals demonstrates the idea that a small percentage of students generate a high number of referrals. There are many repeat offenders with multiple referrals.

Instruments

Because this was secondary analysis, no instrument was used by the evaluators per se; instead, district-wide referral forms used by school administrators were entered into a spreadsheet by the district and the data were sent to the evaluators to be examined and analyzed. These referral forms contain 36 behavioral categories along with qualitative notations about the referred student's behavior. Examples of information on this form include: grade of student, date and time of incident, referring teacher, present action, recommendation for further discipline and signature areas for both student and parents.

Analysis

For the purpose of analysis, five summary categories (called the "Focus 5") were adopted and enhanced from a model already in place in the district. These summary categories are mutually exclusive and include all 36 referral types. The Focus 5 category titles are: 1) Policy referrals, which require mandatory suspension; 2) Violence; 3) Classroom Behavior; 4) Campus and School Rules; and 5) Bus Misconduct. This presentation addresses the most pressing issues reflected in the violence and policy referral categories, which include possession of substances or weapons. Comparative percentages and descriptive statistics are used to highlight the data.

Results

Initial results over the three-year period show some interesting findings with relation to the perception of increased violence and substance abuse in the schools as reported by media. For example, for the 1999 school year, a total of 177,864 referrals were reported with only a small

percentage being either violent or policy type referrals. In fact, the classroom behavior and campus/school rules categories account for about 80% of the total referrals in that year and with bus misconduct added, these three "less severe" categories account for over 90% of the total referrals. This means that less than 10% of referrals included harm to the self or others, carrying a weapon or using or possessing an illegal substance. While these results do not suggest that violence and substance abuse are negligible, but they do confirm that the perception that violence and policy referrals are the majority or even a large minority is misleading.

The next step was to delve further into the violence and policy referrals to examine exactly what had taken place over the three-year period of the baseline study. When highlighting violence and policy referrals only, some interesting trends were discovered during the period beginning in the fall of 1997 and ending in the spring of 2000 (the 1998 through 2000 school years).

The percentages of total referrals for our two severe categories are as follows. In 1998, policy referrals were at 1.4%, in 1999, 1.3% and in 2000, 1.4% of all referrals. Likewise, in 1998 violence referrals were 5.5%, in 1999, 5.6% and in 2000, 5.3% of all referrals. In pragmatic terms, there was essentially no change over the three-year period. The key finding here is that under 6% of the total referrals over three years were violence related while under 2% were policy related, making these two severe categories account for just 7% or less of the total number of referrals.

After each of these categories were deconstructed further, it was found that some shifts have occurred. Within the violence category, both battery and sexual harassment remained steady while fighting decreased and threats and intimidation increased. Certainly the goal is to eliminate these behaviors altogether, but it could be viewed as a positive step, even if temporary, that actually carrying out physical violence is reduced in lieu of threats.

Within the policy category, alcohol and weapons remained constant over the three-year span with only negligible increases in these categories. Conversely, a large shift is present here with a great reduction in the use of tobacco, which greatly decreased, while the use of other drugs almost doubled. Attributions which may account for some of the trends in this category could be: a) the institution of zero tolerance policies, or b) drug use increases are clustered particularly around the use of "club drugs," such as ecstasy (MDMA) and steroid use in males (Goetz, 2000).

What is uncategorically the most striking finding in our analysis was the association of school type with the percentage of violence referrals. Middle schools had the lowest population of students of all non-special schools and yet the highest referral rate for violence. That is, when all violent referrals were looked at by school type, we took the total number of violent referrals in the district over the longitudinal period and broke down just these violent referrals by the type of school. The total population for middle schools is less than half of high schools and yet the percentage of violence referrals has more than doubled across all three years (See Table 1).

Table 1
Violence Referrals by School Type

	N	1998 %	1999 %	2000 %
Elementary Schools	51,380	20.0	21.8	20.8
Middle Schools	25,981	58.6	57.2	53.8
High Schools	31,116	13.3	13.0	16.0
Other Schools	2,459	8.1	7.9	9.3

Discussion

The information presented in this longitudinal study is tentative because it is baseline data. Only after all of the data are submitted for analysis, including the 2003 school year, will we have a clearer picture about what, if any, effect programs have on trends in disciplinary referrals. At that point we can try to measure changes due to interventions/programs that are funded through the SS/HSI grant.

One goal outlined in the grant proposal is for the district to reduce the total number of all referrals and also to reduce the severity of the referral types. We have demonstrated, at least initially, that this trend has already begun.

Referrals are a global outcome in that they do not tell us how or why behaviors increase or decrease; all trend data tell us is what behaviors changed, if any. Therefore while no concrete explanations can be drawn from this analysis, it is helpful in laying the groundwork for beginning the evaluation process and prepares us to look at what is to come over the next two years.

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A Factor Analysis of Perceptions of Violence in Pinellas County Schools

Joan A. Tucker, Gina Santoro, Oliver J. Massey & Kathleen Armstrong

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, rates for both commission of and victimization by homicide in society have been declining gradually. However, the profile of offenders of violent crimes has changed dramatically (Fox & Zawitz, 2000). The mean age of victims and perpetrators of violent crimes has been decreasing since 1976. The rate of homicide victimization in the 14-17 year-old age range increased about 150% between 1985 and 1993. In 1998, the rate of homicide victimization in the 18-24 year-old age range reflected the highest homicide rate of all age groups. Incidents of homicide committed by teenagers 14-17 increased also from 1976, reaching a peak in 1993 when the offending rates of 14-17 year-olds was higher than the offending rates of 25-49 year-olds. While the incidence of violent crimes has decreased overall, younger people often are affected more often and more severely when they do occur.

Similarly, the number of violent crimes committed in schools has decreased, but the number of homicide events involving multiple offenders and victims has increased (Annual Report on School Safety, 1998; Fox & Zawitz, 2000). Homicides committed by younger offenders have been more likely to involve multiple victims than those committed by older offenders. During the 1992-1993 school year there were two incidents, while during the 1997-1998 school year there were six incidents of violent crime involving multiple offenders and victims. The number of victims killed in these events increased 400% from 4 victims nationally during the 1992-1993 school year to 16 victims during the 1997-1998 school year. The results are less clear with respect to perceptions of fear at school. The rate of students who reported fear while traveling to and from school rose from 4% in 1989 to 7% in 1995 (Annual Report on School Safety, 1998), and then declined from 7% to 4% between 1995 and 1999 (Kaufman, et al., 2000). During that same time, the percentage of students ages 12-18 who feared being attacked at school decreased from 9% to 5%. However, fewer students reported feeling not at all worried about being physically attacked in school. In 1993, 48% reported feeling not at all worried, while in 1998, 37% reported feeling not at all worried (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1999). Overall, the conflicting message is that fewer people are worried about being personally attacked, but fewer people feel safe at school. Gaining an accurate report of rates of violent crimes occurring in schools is difficult because some states do not use consistent definitions of violence to collect incident-based data (Florida Department of Education, 1999). This results in significant gaps in the information about crime rates and trends. Florida is one of three states, however, that uses consistent definitions for reporting violent crimes in state, district, and school educational systems.

Data collected from Pinellas County, Florida indicated a decrease in the number of violent acts against persons (e.g., homicide, sexual battery, robbery, battery, kidnapping) between 1995-1998, commensurate with national trends (Florida Department of Education, 1999). Weapons possession, however, increased 26% between the 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 school years. The increase in incidents of student weapons possession suggests that there may be an increased perception of fear among students and staff in Pinellas County, Florida. In order to further investigate the perceptions of school safety a survey was administered to guidance counselors in Pinellas County Schools (PCS).

The Perceptions of School Safety Survey was conducted as part of the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative (SS/HIS). The evaluation team in collaboration with the violence prevention specialists from PCS designed the instrument to serve as a needs assessment tool. By obtaining the staff's perceptions of safety in their schools, the survey would ultimately help to enhance existing strategies and programs dealing with violence and safety issues in the schools.

Method

In developing the survey, attempts were made to include as many items as possible that reflect issues of concern to the schools. As a result, drawing from the school's disciplinary referrals data, items such as bullying, fighting, verbal threats, and physical violence were included. The survey consisted of three sections dealing with: 1) the seriousness of violence in the schools, 2) the effectiveness of current programs and strategies, and 3) the staff's familiarity with SS/HSI programs and strategies. This paper focuses on the first section of the survey dealing with the seriousness of violence. Respondents were asked to rate 19 items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "extreme problem" to "not a problem." In addition, they were asked to rate the overall safety of their school, from "very safe" to "very dangerous." The surveys were distributed to the counseling staff of elementary, middle and high school in Pinellas County with 101 completed surveys returned. The 101 questionnaires represented 66 elementary, 20 middle, and 14 high schools. In addition, a pilot sample of 100 questionnaires was received from teachers and students at one middle school. Only surveys completed by the counseling staff are included in the current analysis.

Preliminary Results

The results of the overall safety revealed that 60.4% of counselors perceived their school to be "safe" and 21% perceived it to be very safe. Results on the first 19 items dealing with the seriousness of violence revealed that counselors in general have a positive perception of their schools. For instance, gangs and activities in school, as illustrated in Figure 1, were not perceived as problems. Two items were of most concern to counselors. These included teasing among students (M = 3.4 reflecting moderate to serious problem and bullying among students (M = 2.9) reflecting a moderate problem. To further analyze the sample a factor analysis was performed on the initial 19 items.

Factor Analysis

The factor analysis was performed using the Maximum Likelihood method with a Varimax Rotation, and produced four factors or groups (see Table 1). Factor one, labeled "Child behaviors" included ten items that were considered common student behavior problems. Representative items include verbal threats among staff with a factor loading of .86 and physical violence among students with a factor loading of .74. Factor two, labeled "Crime" included four items that could be described as illegal activities such as students using drugs in school with a factor loading .95 and gang activity with a loading of .88. Factor three, labeled "School administration" consists of two items related to school administration that includes lack of administrative support and ineffective discipline policies. Although this factor has only two items, they have a high internal reliability (.84). Consequently, further development will be done in to this domain. Factor four, labeled "School locale" includes three items concerning activities in the neighborhood where school is located including vandalism loading .72 and personal property stolen or destroyed loading .66.

Figure 1
Counselor's Perception of School Safety

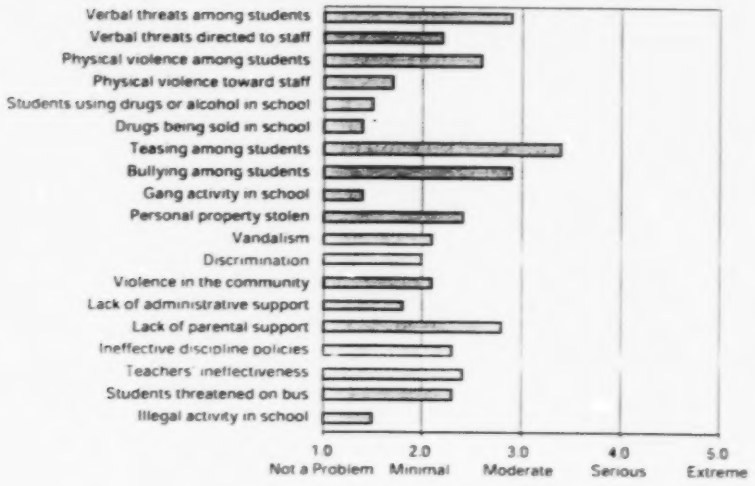

Table 1
Factor Loading for Four-Factor Solution

Factor 1. Child Behaviors	*Loadings*
Verbal Threats	.86
Verbal threats directed at staff	.73
Physical violence among students	.74
Physical violence toward staff	.60
Teasing among students	.67
Bullying among students	.68
Lack of parental support in addressing discipline	.48
Students threatened on bus and at bus stop	.52
Teachers ineffectiveness in addressing discipline problems	.58
Discrimination	.35
Internal reliability = .89	
Factor 2. Crime	***Loadings***
Students using drugs or alcohol in school	.95
Drugs being sold in school	.88
Gang activity in school	.43
Illegal activity in school	.70
Internal reliability = .85	
Factor 3. School Administration	***Loadings***
Lack of administrative support	.62
Ineffective discipline policies	.86
Internal reliability = .84	
Factor 4. School Locale	***Loadings***
Vandalism	.72
Violence in community where school is located	.44
Personal property stolen or destroyed at school	.66
Internal reliability = .74	

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Discussion

This preliminary analysis suggests that in addressing the issues of school safety there seems to be at least four domains related to the perceptions of school safety. These include troublesome behaviors, crime, school administration, and school locale. These factors represent common areas of concern regarding violence and safety in the schools. These preliminary data encourage us to expand the instrument by including other possible factors and administering it to additional school personnel and students. Future plans include the addition of new domains as well as adding new items to some of the existing domains.

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